
Government of the District of Columbia



Testimony of

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State Superintendent of Education
Office of the State Superintendent of Education

Council of the District of Columbia
Committee of the Whole
The Honorable Vincent C. Gray, Chairman

Oversight Hearing on
Progress in the Implementation of the Pre-K Enhancement
and Expansion Act

November 13, 2009

John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Room 412
Washington, DC 20004

DC Council Pre-k Roundtable
November 13, 2009

Introduction

Good afternoon Chairman Gray and Members of the Committee of the Whole. I am Kerri Briggs, State Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia

I am here today to discuss and answer questions regarding the planning year of the Pre-k Enhancement and Expansion Amendment Act of 2008. I am glad to be here to discuss our progress on this important and ambitious piece of legislation. The significance of early childhood education is clear and indisputable. Research shows that children who enter kindergarten without the necessary skills face immense challenges in catching up to their peers, which leads to and perpetuates the achievement gap. DC students have historically scored well below their peers nationally, though the gains demonstrated over the past two years on the DC CAS and the National Assessment of Educational Progress indicate the District is on the right course to reversing this trend. It is of vital importance that we, as a city, give our young children every opportunity to learn the skills necessary to begin school with the resources to succeed. This is an issue where failure is not an option. It is one of my highest priorities as superintendent.

Before I begin, I would like to thank my Assistant Superintendent for Early Childhood Education, Carla Thompson, and her entire team for their tremendous work in the past year to get this initiative off the ground and taking the first steps toward making universal high-quality Pre-k a reality in the District. It has been no small effort on their part.

From DHS to OSSE

I think it is helpful to review briefly the transition of early childhood education in the past two years. With the passage of the Public Education Reform Amendment Act and the consolidation of state-level educational functions under the Office of the State Superintendent of Education in 2007, the Division of Early Childhood Education (then known as the Early Care and Education Administration) was transferred from the Department of Human Services to OSSE. The move from DHS to OSSE put a new emphasis on the education of our youngest citizens, providing the necessary structure for a stronger and more cohesive educational system that aligned education programs and services from birth through adulthood.

In 2008, the District took another significant step with the passage of the Pre-k Enhancement and Expansion Amendment Act. This legislation put DC on the path to universally available high-quality Pre-k in the next five years. The passage of this act not only affirmed the District's commitment to education reform but demonstrated a willingness to tackle one of the more intractable education problems: providing strong educational supports early on so that students can begin school ready to learn, therefore addressing and eliminating the achievement gap.

Background on legislation, highlighting specific provisions

This Act set out an ambitious goal that all DC children and families seeking Pre-k services will have access to high quality Pre-k programs by the year 2014. The law requires a mixed delivery method that provides Pre-k in DCPS and public charter schools using Uniform Per Pupil Funding formula dollars, and in community-based nonprofit organizations, which are eligible to receive funding grants equal to the same per pupil allotment. OSSE is responsible for administering

grants to educators to support professional development and grants to providers to enhance existing programs and attract new ones.

Since the passage of the Pre-k legislation, OSSE has worked steadily to meet requirements and to set up program supports. To that end, last month I submitted the first annual report to the Council detailing our progress in implementing the legislation. The following highlights the work we've completed to date:

Year 1 accomplishments

- Establishment of Early Learning Standards, which were unanimously passed by the State Board of Education in December 2008. All Pre-k classrooms are required to implement researched-based curricula aligned with these standards.
- Development of program requirements necessary to have a high-quality Pre-k program in January 2009 and operating guidelines that detail how those requirements must be met. (These guidelines will form the basis for the required rulemaking which we will be finalizing and submitting to Council later this year.)
- Development of a 5-year strategic expansion plan for achieving universal Pre-k by 2014.
- Provision of grants to the CBOs that had been participating in the Pre-k Incentive Pilot program to facilitate their continued operation under the new legislation.
- Completion of the first round of the Expansion grants, resulting in five new CBO classrooms receiving funding this fall.
- Regular consultation with providers and other stakeholders to quickly identify problems and formulate solutions.

- Monthly professional development for CBO Pre-k teachers and a joint professional development session with DCPS.
- Community forums and information sessions throughout the city to improve parent understanding of the legislation and the importance of high-quality Pre-k.
- Completion of three studies to determine baseline of quality for Pre-k in the District.

Findings

The findings of the three quality and capacity studies provide a comprehensive picture of the current Pre-k landscape. Currently 86 percent of all 3- and 4-year-olds in the District are enrolled in a Pre-k program, leaving approximately 2,000 children who are not enrolled in Pre-k.

Capacity

The physical capacity of all existing Pre-k providers is sufficient to cover 100 percent of all 3- and 4-year olds in the District, meaning *physical space is available* for any child whose parents want to enroll in Pre-k. That's the good news.

Quality

We know anecdotally and through reports, however, that the quality of Pre-k programs is not equal and that they are not distributed evenly across the District.

The baseline for DC's Pre-k quality was established with three different assessments measuring three aspects of a Pre-k program: (1) ELLCO determined language and literacy-related features of the classroom, (2) ECERS-revised showed us the quality of the general classroom

environment, and (3) CLASS reported the emotional support, classroom organization, instructional support, and student engagement.

The sampling used in the assessments was large enough to gauge our starting point and ensure a diverse analysis of classrooms, yet was controlled enough to meet the limited resources available to fulfill the need for a quality baseline study. The results indicate that Pre-k programs scored at the “Basic” level. It’s important to understand, in this case “Basic” is above the national average. That’s an encouraging starting point – it indicates, clearly, that we have plenty of room for improvement, but also that there is a solid foundation for high-quality services in the District.

Also worth noting as an indicator of quality is that each of the CBOs that received a grant from OSSE under this legislation is required to take a pre- and post-test each school year on these assessments. The overwhelming majority of these programs saw improvement from the pre-test to the post-test.

Need

Finally, we conducted a study to pinpoint, both by Ward and zip code, the location of those children who are most at-risk to start school without the knowledge and skills to meaningfully participate in school. This “Risk & Reach” analysis is in the process of being finalized this month but early results were included in the report submitted to you. Preliminary findings indicate that Wards 5, 7, and 8 have children with the highest risk factors. These data will be used to target services and expansion to geographic regions of high-risk to increase access to high-quality Pre-k services.

Based on the results of these studies, our goal, over the next five years, is to increase the number of providers meeting the high-quality requirements by 20 percent each year, and decrease the number of children not enrolled in Pre-k by 20 percent each year. As we expand and enhance Pre-k services throughout the District, we will make sure that resources are adequately targeted to encourage the enhancement of Pre-k services in Wards 5, 7, and 8.

Next Steps

Our objective during this first year has been to get the basic infrastructure for the new comprehensive Pre-k initiative in place, and I feel we have done that. We have clear standards; we have basic operating guidelines, and we have collected data to help pinpoint our resources. Moving forward, we need to continue with these tasks, to improve the quality of the existing programs, to continue expanding professional development opportunities for existing and new teachers, and to engage parents and the public to better understand how Pre-k is vital to ensuring that all of DC's children enter kindergarten on equal footing.

Our primary task will be awarding grants. There are three grant competitions related to the Pre-k legislation. The first set includes \$750,000 in Expansion grants for new CBO classrooms meeting the high-quality requirements. The first round of Expansion grants, which established 5 new classrooms, including two new CBOs, were recently awarded. That brings us to a total of 26 classrooms across 9 CBOs that are receiving funding under the Pre-k legislation. In order to meet our goal of 30 CBO classrooms funded this fiscal year, last week OSSE announced a second round of applications for Expansion grants to be awarded this year. In addition, DCPS currently has 86 schools with Pre-k classrooms and there are 54 public charter schools providing Pre-k

operating across all eight wards. Enrollment numbers for both DCPS and public charter schools are currently being audited and should be available in early 2010.

There are two other grant initiatives planned for this winter: the Enhancement Grants of approximately \$625,000 and the Higher Education Incentive Grants of approximately \$850,000. The Enhancement grants, which are sometimes referred to as program assistance grants, will be available to improve any existing Pre-k program – DCPS, charter schools, or CBOs. We hope to attract a wide array of potential grantees, from those with well-established programs that will use the funds to take the next step in quality, to those with newer programs that will utilize the funding to help become accredited.

The \$850,000 Higher Education Incentive Grants will consist of two components – one for current teachers to work towards a higher degree and one for individuals interested in joining the Pre-k workforce as new teachers. We are still working out the final details for these grants, but this is an important initiative for elevating the professional caliber of the Pre-k workforce and I expect to have more specific information to share on these in the near future.

This winter, we will issue proposed Pre-k regulations to codify the current requirements in the Operating Guidelines. These new regulations, which we will submit to the Council for review, will also include licensing requirements for all Pre-k providers.

Challenges

I'm pleased with the work we've completed so far and our plans to provide grants in the next few months. This work is the foundation necessary to understand how and where to target resources.

We know that there is capacity to meet the current demand. But in order to transform that capacity into universal high-quality Pre-k, we are going to have to increase awareness in the city.

I want to highlight two of the challenges we are facing:

- The diversity of our providers across sectors is key to creating a comprehensive system. OSSE is collaborating with officials from DCPS, the Public Charter School Board, and individual charter schools to create a mixed delivery system that functions effectively.
- The legislation tasks OSSE with determining what national accreditation is required by all Pre-k providers. We need to consider the cost and time required of providers to become accredited and to remain accredited. OSSE is working to determine the best course of action to assist in an accreditation process that will encourage and support Pre-k providers, particularly in areas where we know the demand outstrips the supply.

We are in the process of addressing these issues.

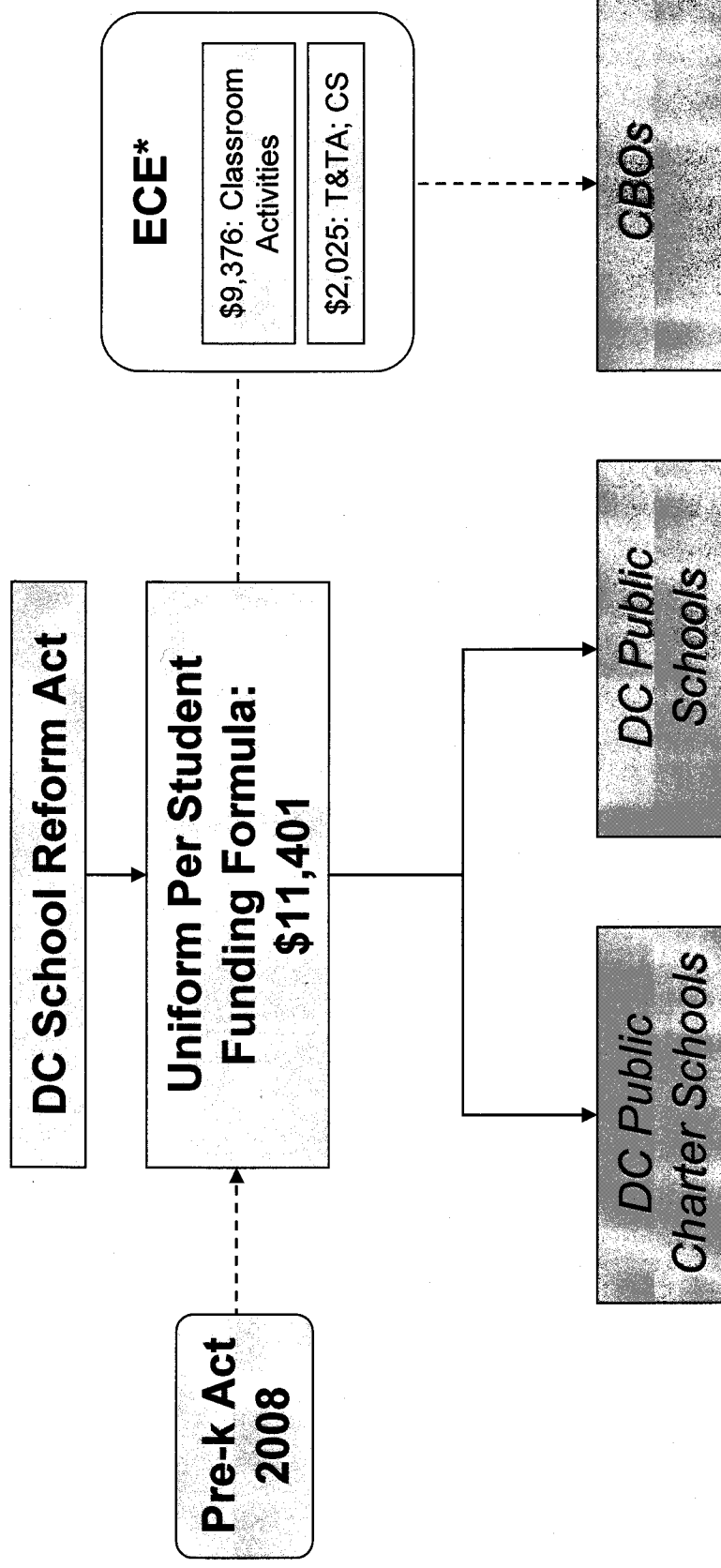
As I mentioned at the outset, I take our charge to provide high-quality Pre-k to every child very seriously. I am pleased with the work we have completed so far. As indicated by the studies the level of quality of our programs is slightly better than the national average, while I recognize there is room for improvement. We also have a clear understanding of the need and how resources should be distributed. Still I know the real work is just beginning. I am looking

forward to working with Mayor Fenty, the Council, and our stakeholders throughout the city to meet those challenges.

Thank you. I am happy to take your questions at this time.

FUNDING PRE-K

Through the authority of the Pre-k Expansion and Enhancement Act of 2008, Pre-k students in CBOs receive the same level of funding as Pre-k students in DCPS and DCPCS. This amount is equal to the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula and applies for already existing and new "expansion" programs. Currently, DCPS and DCPCS automatically qualify for these funds. In the future, they will have to demonstrate that they meet the high-quality standards. CBO programs must go through an application process to be eligible.



*ECE distributes funds to Community based organizations. Classroom expenses plus Training & Technical Assistance and Comprehensive Services add up to the Uniform Per Student Funding amount of \$11,401.

Pre-k Grants

Enhancement Grants: is a competitive grant process that will assist programs currently serving 3 and 4 year old children to meet the required high-quality standards but not currently receiving Pre-k Expansion and Enhancement funding.

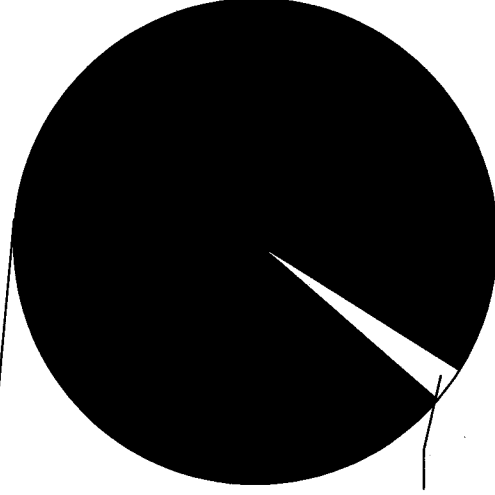
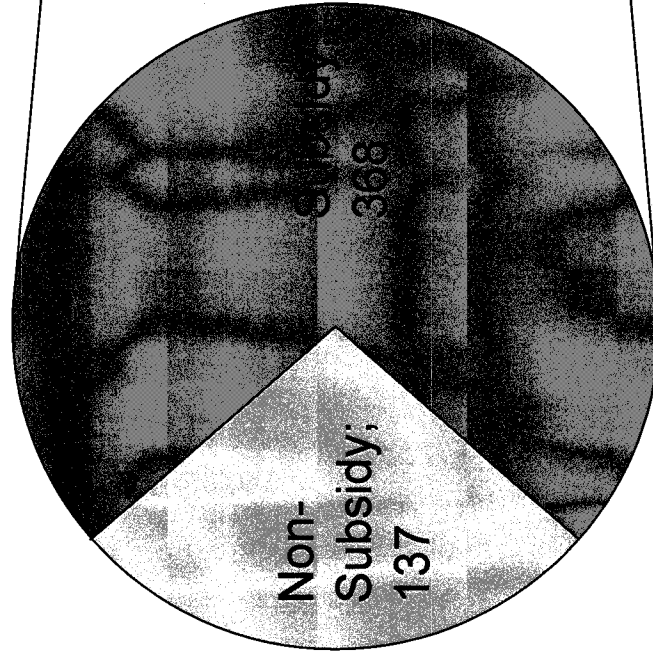
Pre-k teachers from all sectors are eligible to apply for the following grants/scholarships:

- **Higher Education Grants:** will increase the number of pre-k teachers, and assistant teachers with advanced learning credentials
- **Higher Education Scholarships:** will support qualified individuals who have an interest in the pre-k education field

Community-based Pre-k Providers as Subset of Licensed Child-Care Providers

**All Licensed Providers
(total: 505)**

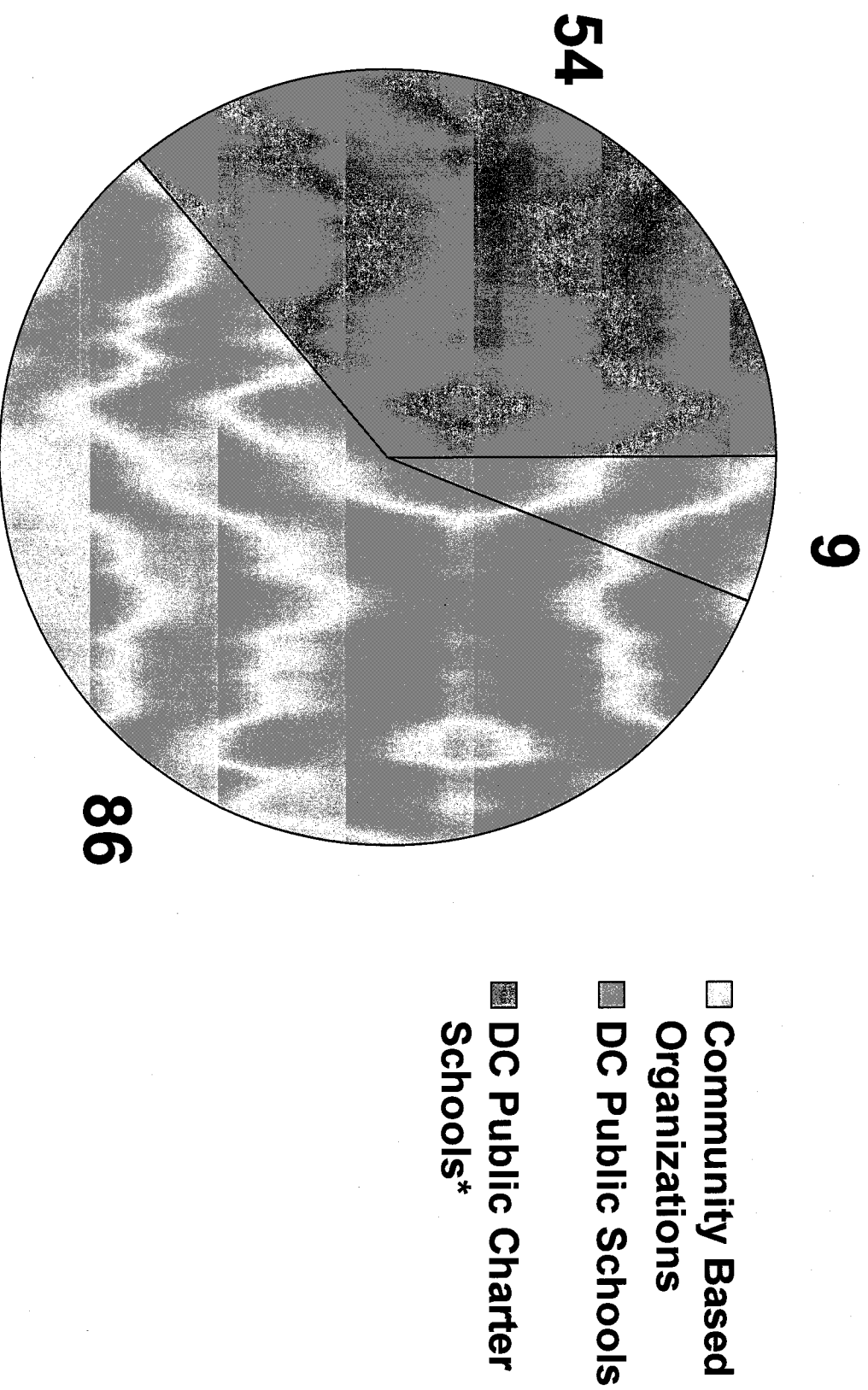
**Subset of
Subsidy Providers (total: 368)**



Pre-k*: 9

*There are 9 Community-based Pre-k Classrooms and 26 Pre-k Classrooms within those 9 CBOs.

Distribution of Pre-k Providers



*This number refers to individual charters only. Charters with multiple campuses are counted as one charter school.